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# Ethnic discrimination and global self-worth in early adolescents: The mediating role of ethnic self-esteem

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Peer victimization based on one's ethnic group membership contributes to the problems and conflicts of ethnic minority children around the world. With ethnic discrimination, a part of the self is implicated. Hence, it is likely that being treated negatively on the basis of one's ethnicity has a negative influence on ethnic self-esteem and thereby on feelings of global self-worth. Following structural models of the self it was predicted that ethnic self-esteem mediates the relationship between ethnic peer discrimination and global self-worth. To test this prediction a large scale study ( $N = 2682$ ) was conducted among Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Dutch young adolescents (aged 10 to 13) living in The Netherlands. Using structural equation analysis, we found the predicted mediation for all four groups of participants. In addition, to examine the precise role of ethnic discrimination we also considered other types and dimensions of peer victimization. Our distinction between reasons (personal and ethnic) and types (teasing/name calling and social exclusion form play) of peer victimization fitted the data adequately. Global self-worth was more strongly related to experiences with teasing and name calling than to social exclusion.

## Introduction

Peer victimization based on one's ethnic group membership tends to be interpreted by children as discrimination (Verkuyten, Kinket, & Van der Wiele, 1997) and is typically assumed to have a negative impact on psychological wellbeing, and self-esteem in particular. Ethnic discrimination is an attack upon, and a negative response to, something about the self that is difficult to change. Hence, it is likely that being treated negatively on the basis of one's ethnic identity has a negative influence on the self-evaluation of this identity and thereby on global self-worth.

There are relatively few studies on the effects of discrimination on ethnic self-evaluation and feelings of global self-worth among early adolescents. Furthermore, the research to date has been predominantly carried out among African-Americans. Clearly there is a need for data to be gathered among different ethnic groups and in other countries. In addition, to understand the precise role of peer victimization based on one's group membership it is important to consider other forms of peer victimization. An examination of these forms can improve our understanding of the problems and conflicts facing ethnic minority children. As Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff (2003) conclude in their study among African-Americans, "additional studies are needed to examine how different types of ethnic devaluation affect adolescents of different ethnic groups in diverse geographic settings" (p. 1227).

Our study responds to this need. It was conducted in The

Netherlands among young adolescents between 10 and 13 years of age. A large-scale study was conducted among the three numerically largest ethnic minority groups in The Netherlands: Turks, Moroccans, and Surinamese. Ethnically Dutch early adolescents were also studied as a comparison group. The aim of this study was to get a better understanding of the relationship between perceived ethnic discrimination by peers and self-evaluations. Ethnic self-esteem was examined as a mediator between perceived discrimination and global self-worth and ethnic group was examined as a possible moderator of this relationship. In addition, in order to examine the role of ethnic discrimination other types of peer victimization were considered. We used structural equation techniques for examining these forms and their relationships to self-feelings.

## Global self-worth and ethnic identity

Numerous studies have found that, in general, the global self-worth of ethnic minorities is not lower than that of majority group members (see Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Twenge & Crocker, 2002, for reviews). Compared to this line of work there are few studies that have examined self-feelings in relation to one's ethnic group membership. However, there is typically a degree of disjuncture between global self-worth and racial or ethnic self-esteem. How an individual feels about him- or herself in general is something different to how an individual feels about being a member of a specific ethnic

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or racial group. Bat-Chava and Steen (1997) found a moderate overall association of 0.34 in their meta-analysis of 62 studies from different countries involving more than 15,000 participants, which was robust across ethnicities, genders, and age groups (Phinney, 1991). Hence, both aspects can be relatively independent and may be differently affected by negative experiences such as prejudice and discrimination.

The question of the relationship between global self-worth and ethnic identity is contentious. It depends on how racial and ethnic identity is viewed. Many different theoretical approaches have been proposed, such as developmental models (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1995; Phinney, 1989), ecological and contextual approaches (Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Coll et al., 1996; Simons et al., 2002), and social psychological ones (e.g., Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Furthermore, various dimensions have been distinguished and numerous terms have been used. Most authors agree that ethnic identity is a multidimensional construct and dimensions such as "evaluation", "importance", "belonging", "commitment", and "sense of interdependence" have been distinguished (see Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Phinney, 1991; Ruble et al., 2004; Verkuyten, 2005, for reviews). Depending on the particular dimension, different associations with discrimination and global self-worth can be expected. For example, feelings of ethnic group belonging and connection may compensate for, or buffer against, the rejection involved in prejudice and discrimination (e.g., Cross, 1991; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002; Sellers et al., 1998). In their study among African-American early adolescents, Wong et al. (2003) found evidence for this in relation to self-competency beliefs, school achievement and problem behaviors. However, ethnic identification did not buffer against the negative effects of perceived discrimination on self-esteem (see also Simons et al., 2002).

In this study we focus on the evaluation of ethnic identity or ethnic self-esteem. To do so, we use the framework of multifaceted or hierarchical models of the self that have been proposed by different authors and examined in various studies (e.g. Byrne & Shavelson, 1996; Fleming & Courtney, 1984; Harter, 1999; Hoelter, 1986; Rosenberg, 1979; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). These structural models place global self-worth at the apex, and other self-evaluations, such as academic, social and ethnic self-esteem, as sources for global self-worth. The source self-evaluations are themselves dependent on specific experiences and actual behavior. Empirical support for this type of model exists, not only in studies carried out in the United States but also in other countries such as Korea (Song & Hattie, 1984), Australia (Trent, Russell, & Cooney, 1994), and the Philippines (Watkins, Fleming, Carmen, & Alfon, 1989). Moreover, support is not restricted to the academic domain during adolescence and adulthood but also includes the relational domain in early adolescence and late childhood (e.g. Byrne & Shavelson, 1996; Harter, 1999; Pallas, Entwisle, Alexander, & Weinstein, 1990; Van den Bergh & De Rycke, 2003), as well as social identity evaluations among children (e.g., Hoelter, 1986).

These multifaceted models propose that the intermediate level in the hierarchy – in our case ethnic self-esteem – has a mediating role in linking discrimination to feelings of global self-worth. For example, a girl may have a generally rather negative view about herself because she has a negative attitude towards her ethnic identity, and she has this attitude because

she experiences ethnic discrimination. To our knowledge, the possible mediating role of ethnic self-esteem in early adolescence has not been addressed systematically. However, the existence of such a role would help us to understand how exactly, or the psychological mechanism by which, ethnic discrimination affects global self-worth. Following hierarchical models of the self, we expected that ethnic self-esteem would mediate the relationship between perceived discrimination and global self-worth. Furthermore, in order to understand the precise role of perceived ethnic discrimination, other types of victimization were also considered.

## Ethnic discrimination and victimization

The difficulty of pinpointing specific examples of discrimination makes it necessary to distinguish between perceived and actual discrimination. The subjective interpretation of events as discriminatory may differ from actual discrimination, for example, because of a tendency to deny personal discrimination. However, it can be expected that perceived discrimination, in particular, is related negatively to psychological wellbeing and feelings of self-worth. Empirical evidence supporting this relationship has been found in different countries, such as the United States (e.g. Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999), Canada (e.g., Noh, Beiser, Kaspar, Hou, & Rummens, 1999), Finland (e.g., Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000), and The Netherlands (e.g. Koomen & Fränkel, 1992). Most of these studies use direct questions about having been discriminated against in different domains, such as on the streets, in shops, and in education. These studies were all conducted among adults and late adolescents. There are a few studies among young adolescents. Fisher, Wallace, and Fenton (2000), for example, showed that perceived peer discrimination was significantly associated with psychological distress and low global self-worth among adolescents (13 to 19 years of age), from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds attending an urban public school in the United States. Rumbaut (1995) studied a sample of more than 5000 immigrant adolescents between 14 and 15 years of age in southern California and Florida. He found that perceived discrimination elevated depressive symptoms, and that anticipated discrimination on the labor market was significantly associated with decreased global self-worth. Verkuyten (1998) found a negative relationship between perceived discrimination by peers and global self-worth among a similar age group of Turkish and Moroccan youth in The Netherlands.

Studies among early adolescents are even more scarce. One example is a study conducted by Szalacha et al. (2003) among Puerto Rican children. The authors found that perceiving discrimination and worrying about discrimination were negatively associated with self-esteem and positively with depression and stress. Similar results were found by Wong et al. (2003) and by Simons et al. (2002) in their studies among African-American children. However, these studies did not examine the possible mediating role of ethnic self-esteem and did not consider other types of victimization.

Children may victimize one another in different ways, in various contexts and on the basis of different criteria. Victimization can, for example, take the form of name calling or social exclusion, and may focus on individual behavior or social category membership such as ethnicity and race. Ethnicity,

however, has received relatively little attention among peer victimization researchers. Typically research has not considered discrimination or situations where children are treated negatively because of their ethnic background. The focus has usually been on personal victimization rather than on ethnic victimization (see Deater-Deckard, 2001; Hawker & Boulton, 2002, for reviews). The former refers to those situations where negative peer experiences are related to individual characteristics, such as acting 'strange' and stuttering. The latter occurs when children's negative experiences are connected to their ethnic group membership. A distinction between personal and ethnic victimization is similar to the social-psychological distinction between personal and collective identity (Tajfel, 1981), and is useful for examining the proposed mediating role of ethnic self-esteem. In contrast to personal victimization, with ethnic discrimination the ethnic part of the self is implicated. Hence it can be expected that ethnic self-esteem mediates only the relationship between ethnic discrimination and global self-worth.

In addition to personal and ethnic victimization we explored whether the participants make a distinction between types of victimization. Peer victimization can take many different forms ranging from overt behavior, such as physical and verbal aggression, to more indirect forms, such as shunning and having rumors spread around. In The Netherlands, Verkuyten et al. (1997) examined early adolescents' own understandings about discrimination using open-ended instruments. They found shared beliefs and ideas about when a specific act is considered discriminatory among both Dutch and ethnic minority children. The prototypical example of discrimination was a situation of ethnic teasing and name calling. To a lesser degree, an unequal division of valued objects among contemporaries and social exclusion by peers of different ethnic groups was also seen as discrimination. For the present study we focused on name calling and teasing and on peer exclusion during play.

Different studies have found that name calling and teasing are among the most common forms of peer victimization, and that being excluded from peer groups also occurs frequently (e.g. Borg, 1999; Kelly & Cohn, 1988; Smith & Shu, 2000; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Name calling and teasing are explicit and public expressions of victimization and frequent sources of conflict, and have been found to be highly correlated (e.g., Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001).

Social exclusion from peer activities, however, is often less explicit, more difficult to pinpoint and is more easily justified. For example, children can argue that every child is free to choose with whom he or she wants to play and therefore has a right to choose his or her playmates (see Verkuyten et al., 1997). Children and early adolescents have also been found to justify peer exclusion by appealing to effective group functioning (Killen & Stangor, 2001). We expected that participants would make a distinction between perceptions of teasing and name calling on the one hand and of peer exclusion on the other. Furthermore, because the former type of victimization is more visible and unambiguous than the latter, we expected that the former would have a stronger negative relationship to global self-worth than the latter one.

The expectations that we examined for the present study were derived as discussed above. To summarize: First, ethnic self-esteem was expected to mediate the relationship between perceived ethnic discrimination and global self-worth. Second, early adolescents were expected to make a distinc-

tion between teasing and name calling on the one hand and peer exclusion on the other. Third, teasing/name calling was expected to have a stronger negative relationship to global self-worth than peer exclusion. These predictions were tested among Surinamese, Moroccan, Turkish and ethnically Dutch children.<sup>1</sup> The present interest is not so much in the degree of victimization but in the underlying dimensions of, and the relationships between, victimization and ethnic self-esteem and global self-worth. We will examine whether these dimensions and relationships are similar for the different ethnic groups.

## Method

### Participants

The data were gathered in the Spring of 2000 in 82 primary schools across The Netherlands. The schools that participated form a cross-section of schools from 30 different cities in all regions of the country.

At each school, the children in the two highest forms (10–13 years of age:  $M = 11.38$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) participated on a voluntary basis. The anonymous paper-and-pencil questionnaire was administered in 182 classes and all children approached were willing to participate. Ethnic background was assessed by means of self-definition and two questions on the ethnic background of the parents. For the present analyses we focused on the children of the largest ethnic groups. That is, those children who used the same label for defining themselves, and their father and their mother.

The sample used in the analyses contained 2682 children: 1494 of ethnic Dutch background, 602 of Turkish, 455 of Moroccan, and 131 of Surinamese background. All children were from classes with at maximum 90% and at minimum 5% Dutch children, and 50.4% were girls and 49.6% boys. There was no ethnic difference for gender,  $\chi^2(3, 2675) = 5.14$ ,  $p > .15$ .

No information was available on either the socioeconomic status or to which generation the ethnic minority participants belonged. However, most ethnic minority groups in The Netherlands have a relatively low socioeconomic position. Furthermore, in contrast to adults and adolescents, no clear relationship between social class and self-esteem has been found for primary school children (see Twenge & Campbell, 2002, for a review). In addition, in The Netherlands, most ethnic minority early adolescents are either born in The Netherlands or immigrated before the age of 4 (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2000). In The Netherlands, all children are educated in Dutch and the questionnaire was in this language.

<sup>1</sup> The Surinamese originate from the former Dutch colony, Surinam. The vast majority are Dutch nationals but their racial distinctiveness makes them "visible". The Turks and Moroccans living in The Netherlands are also "visible" and have a relatively short historical relationship with The Netherlands, which began with them acting as a source of migrant labor. Most are of Islamic background and have a strong sense of their own culture and history that they want to preserve (e.g., Pels, 1999). Out of all the ethnic minority groups in The Netherlands, Turks and Moroccans have the lowest prestige and are evaluated the most negatively by early adolescents as well as by others (Hagendoorn, 1995; Verkuyten & Kinket, 2000). The Surinamese are much more accepted and, due to their colonial history, more like the Dutch in terms of language, culture and religion.



## Measures

For making a distinction between personal and ethnic victimization, a two-part questionnaire was used that focused participants' attention on their personal and ethnic selves respectively (see Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001). The first part focused on the personal level by emphasizing the importance of personal opinions and individual differences in the introduction, and by using questions on attitudes towards individual learning, school satisfaction and the personal self.

The measure of global personal self-worth consisted of 5 items of Rosenberg's (1965) scale. All items are general self-esteem statements, free from particular contexts or self-concept components. The items were positively worded because Marsh (1986) has demonstrated that early adolescents have difficulty responding appropriately to negatively worded items. We modified the scale by reformulating the items slightly for our age group. The response format ranged from "no, certainly not" (1), "no" (2), "yes" (3), to "yes, definitely" (4). For the total sample Cronbach's alpha was 0.75. For the Dutch, the alpha was 0.74, for the Turks it was 0.74, for the Moroccans 0.78 and for the Surinamese 0.75.

Experiences with personal victimization were assessed using four questions on 5-point scales (ranging from "no, never", "no, not often", "sometimes", "yes, regularly", to "yes, very often"). The questions were introduced by stating that "the next questions are about you personally in relation to other children". Two questions focused on the frequency of experiences with teasing or name calling. These were asked regarding the situation in school, and regarding the direct neighborhood. The other two questions concerned experiences with social exclusion from play activities in school and in the neighborhood. These four questions were based on previous Dutch studies that examined early adolescents' own understandings about victimization (Verkuyten et al., 1997) and the relationship of forms of victimization to psychological well-being (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2000, 2001).

The second part of the questionnaire focused on the collective level or ethnic identity. In order to focus children's attention on ethnic group differences and the collective self, they were asked first questions about ethnic diversity and multicultural education (see Verkuyten & Thijs, 2000). Subsequently using Phinney's (1992) open-ended question they were asked for their ethnic self-definition, "Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be . . .". Subsequently, the children were asked to fill in their self-label in the subsequent questions on ethnic self-esteem and ethnic discrimination.

Ethnic self-esteem was measured using the 4 items (same response format as for global self-worth) from the private subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSE) as developed by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992). They elaborated on the distinction between personal and collective identity as different aspects of the self-concept by proposing two distinct forms of self-feelings, one personal and one collective. The private subscale is the 'group-level equivalent of global personal self-esteem' (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990, p. 62). According to Crocker and Luhtanen, the subscale measures trait-like individual differences in the extent to which people possess a positive collective identity. As such it is comparable to scales measuring trait-like differences in global personal self-worth. The original scale measures the evaluation of group memberships in general but is often used to measure self-

esteem as an ethnic group member. Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) report that the psychometric properties of such a version closely resemble those of the original scale. Two sample items (4-point scales) are "I feel good about being Turkish (Moroccan, Surinamese, Dutch)" and "I am proud to be Turkish (Moroccan, Surinamese, Dutch)". Reliability analysis yielded an alpha of 0.73. For the Dutch, Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese participants, the alphas were 0.71, 0.73, 0.77 and 0.72, respectively.

Experiences with ethnic discrimination were assessed using the same four questions with the same 5-point scales as those used for measuring personal victimization. The questions focused on the frequency of experiences with ethnic teasing/name calling and social exclusion. The early adolescents were asked to what extent they were called names and teased *because* of their ethnic background. This was asked regarding the situation in school, and that of the direct neighborhood. The other two questions concerned experiences with social exclusion from play activities because of one's ethnicity in school and in the neighborhood.

## Results

### Preliminary analysis

Three preliminary analyses were performed. First, preliminary analyses indicated no age (10–11 versus 12–13 years of age) differences, so the data were collapsed across ages. Second, for descriptive purposes differences in the two self-feelings measures were examined with MANOVA. The two measures were analyzed as multiple dependent variables and ethnic group and gender were entered as the independent variable. The multivariate effects (Pillai's) for ethnic group,  $F(6, 2675) = 43.53, p < .001$ , and for gender,  $F(2, 2675) = 7.64, p < .001$ , were significant. Means and standard deviations for the two measures and for the different ethnic groups are presented in the first two rows in Table 1.

For both measures, the univariate results indicated significant effects for ethnic group. Post-hoc analyses (Scheffe) showed that the Dutch had significantly lower scores than the three ethnic minority groups for global self-worth and for ethnic self-esteem. Thus, the Dutch had lower global self-worth and lower ethnic self-esteem than the Turks, Moroccans and Surinamese participants. In addition, univariate results indicated that boys and girls did differ significantly,  $F(1, 2823) = 15.18, p < .001$ . Boys had higher scores than girls for global self worth ( $M = 2.76, SD = .44$  and  $M = 2.65, SD = .41$ ). There was no significant gender difference for ethnic self-esteem,  $F(1, 2675) = 1.84, p > .10$ . In addition, the multivariate interaction effect between ethnic group and gender was not significant,  $F(6, 2675) = 0.55, p > .05$ . Hence, the gender differences found were the same for all ethnic groups.

Third, the eight questions on peer victimization were analyzed as multiple dependent variables using MANOVA. Ethnic group and gender were independent factors. The multivariate effects for ethnicity,  $F(24, 2675) = 11.80, p < .001$ , and for gender,  $F(8, 2675) = 6.06, p < .001$ , were significant. The results for ethnic group are presented in Table 1. In general, the participants have a low likelihood of perceiving personal victimization and ethnic discrimination. In addition, the mean scores for the four questions on

**Table 1**

*Means and Standard Deviations (between parentheses) for the self-feelings measures (4-point scales) and the victimization questions (5-point scales) for four groups of participants (with gender as covariate)*

	<i>Dutch</i>	<i>Turks</i>	<i>Moroccans</i>	<i>Surinamese</i>	
<i>Univariate</i>	( <i>N</i> = 1494)	( <i>N</i> = 602)	( <i>N</i> = 455)	( <i>N</i> = 131)	<i>F-value</i>
<i>Self-feelings</i>					
Global self-worth	3.11 <sup>a</sup> (.49)	3.20 <sup>b</sup> (.52)	3.33 <sup>c</sup> (.50)	3.23 <sup>bc</sup> (.53)	24.19***
Ethnic self-esteem	3.50 <sup>a</sup> (.49)	3.75 <sup>b</sup> (.46)	3.83 <sup>b</sup> (.36)	3.73 <sup>b</sup> (.43)	82.99***
<i>Personal victimization</i>					
Teasing/name calling in school	2.40 <sup>a</sup> (1.02)	2.46 <sup>a</sup> (1.09)	2.20 <sup>b</sup> (1.00)	2.38 <sup>b</sup> (1.06)	5.76**
Teasing/name calling in neighborhood	2.19 <sup>a</sup> (1.00)	1.97 <sup>b</sup> (.99)	1.90 <sup>b</sup> (.93)	2.02 <sup>ab</sup> (.98)	14.64***
Exclusion in school	2.06 <sup>a</sup> (.94)	1.97 <sup>ab</sup> (1.06)	1.91 <sup>b</sup> (.99)	2.02 <sup>ab</sup> (.95)	3.47*
Exclusion in neighborhood	1.91 (.93)	1.87 (1.05)	1.77 (.96)	1.85 (.98)	2.01
<i>Ethnic discrimination</i>					
Ethnic teasing/name calling in school	1.36 <sup>a</sup> (.75)	1.75 <sup>b</sup> (1.03)	1.48 <sup>a</sup> (.87)	1.54 <sup>ab</sup> (.87)	32.48***
Ethnic teasing/name calling in neighborhood	1.35 <sup>a</sup> (.72)	1.77 <sup>b</sup> (.97)	1.57 <sup>c</sup> (.89)	1.71 <sup>bc</sup> (1.03)	37.91***
Ethnic exclusion in school	1.43 <sup>a</sup> (1.06)	1.65 <sup>b</sup> (1.27)	1.60 <sup>b</sup> (1.28)	1.56 <sup>ab</sup> (1.25)	5.71**
Ethnic exclusion in neighborhood	1.36 <sup>a</sup> (.89)	1.53 <sup>b</sup> (1.22)	1.64 <sup>b</sup> (1.13)	1.68 <sup>b</sup> (1.27)	13.14***

*Note.* Row means with different subscripts (a,b,c) represent significant differences at  $p < .05$ .

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

personal victimization are higher than the scores for ethnic discrimination. Furthermore, compared to the ethnic minority groups, the Dutch participants tend to have somewhat higher scores for personal victimization, whereas the ethnic minorities, and the Turks in particular, report more experiences of ethnic discrimination.

Univariate results indicated that, compared to girls, boys reported significantly more experiences (both teasing/name calling and social exclusion) with personal victimization in the neighborhood, but not in the school context. Furthermore, boys had higher scores than girls for ethnic teasing/name calling in school and in the neighborhood. In addition, there was again no significant multivariate interaction effect between ethnic group and gender,  $F(24, 2675) = 1.06$ ,  $p > .05$ . Therefore, we did not include gender in any of the subsequent analyses in which the focus is on ethnic group differences.

### *Underlying victimization dimensions*

We analyzed the data using the structural equation modeling program EQS Version 5.0 for Windows (Bentler & Wu, 1995).<sup>2</sup> Because we were interested in the underlying forms and dimensions of peer victimization, we examined possible latent factors with the personal victimization and ethnic discrimination items as indicators. As these variables were considerably skewed to the right we transformed them by

computing their log values (see Stevens, 1996).<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, the latent factors behind these items were examined in multiple group analyses in three steps. First, we examined a model in which the scores were made dependent on two factors: A factor for personal victimization and a factor for ethnic victimization. Because we assumed that there would be considerable overlap between the latent factors, we allowed both factors to be correlated. The factor correlation and each of the factor loadings were constrained to be equal across the four groups. The fit of this model was rather inadequate (Hu & Bentler, 1999):  $\chi^2(103, 2682) = 1284.129$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .775, SRMR = .098, RMSEA = .065. Second, we added two extra factors that referred to the form of the victimization: name calling/teasing and social exclusion, respectively. A correlation between both factors was allowed.

However, for conceptual reasons their correlations with personal and ethnic victimization were fixed to be zero. In addition, to increase the fit of the model a covariance between two error terms was allowed (1 and 3). This covariance seemed to denote a specific factor for experiencing personal victimization in the school context. It was constrained to be similar across the four groups. The model provided an adequate fit,  $\chi^2(93, 2682) = 317.085$ ,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .957, SRMR = .076, and RMSEA = .030. Finally, we examined whether allowing different factor correlations for the four groups would significantly improve the fit of the model. Lmtests revealed that

<sup>2</sup> Because the items were not normally distributed, we did further analyses in which two additional indices were examined, the Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square statistic and the robust Comparative Fit Index. These indices were examined for the four ethnic groups separately because they cannot be obtained in multiple group analyses in EQS. The analyses indicated that for all four groups the CFI robust had similar fit as the CFI. In addition, for the groups, the Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-squares were lower than the "ordinary" chi-square test, indicating better fit.

<sup>3</sup> The fact that the data were collected within school classes may have affected the results. Groups in these classes are almost never formed randomly and individuals that belong to the same group will at least share some experiences. Hence, the data structure was clearly hierarchically nested and individual scores within classes were not independent. For this reason we also conducted this analysis, as well as all other factor analyses in the present article, on the pooled within-classes covariance matrix. These analyses, in which we controlled for between-class differences, yielded virtually the same results. This indicated that our results were relatively unaffected by systematic differences between classes.

**Table 2***Unstandardized factor model of victimization dimensions*

	<i>Personal</i>	<i>Ethnic</i>	<i>Teasing/ name calling</i>	<i>Exclusion</i>
1. Teasing/name calling in school	.403		.707	
2. Teasing/name calling in street	.614		.403	
3. Exclusion at school	.510			.138
4. Exclusion in street	.638			.101
5. Ethnic teasing/name calling in school		.263	.117	
6. Ethnic teasing/name calling in street		.351	.080	
7. Ethnic exclusion at school		.116		.379
8. Ethnic exclusion in street		.169		.302

Note. Covariance 1,3 = .188,  $p < .01$ .

releasing three constraints for similar factor correlations would make the model significantly better. These were the correlations between the personal and the ethnic factor for the Moroccan and Turkish versus the other children, and the correlation between the teasing/name calling and exclusion factors for the Turks relative to the other three groups. Releasing these three constraints resulted in a significant improvement of the model,  $\chi^2(90, 2682) = 286.478$ ,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .963, SRMR = .074, and RMSEA = .029. For the Dutch and the Surinamese children the correlation between the personal and the ethnic factor was .39,  $p < .01$ . For the Turks and Moroccans this correlation was .56 and .67, respectively, both  $p < .01$ . The correlation between teasing/name calling and exclusion was .30 for the Dutch, Moroccan and Surinamese children,  $p < .01$ , but .08 for the Turks ( $p > .10$ ). The unstandardized factor solution is given in Table 2. All factor loadings were significant at  $p < .01$ .

### *Victimization, ethnic self-esteem and global self-worth*

We added global self-esteem and ethnic self-esteem to the model in our multigroup analyses. In this model all factors were allowed to be correlated except correlations of personal and ethnic victimization with name calling/teasing and social exclusion. The fit of this model was adequate:  $\chi^2(146, 2682) = 389.385$ ,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .957, SRMR = .069, and RMSEA = .025. Of the nine correlations involving global self-worth and ethnic self-esteem, six were significant at  $p < .01$ . Ethnic self-esteem was positively related to global self-worth ( $r = .33$ ) and negatively to personal ( $r = -.10$ ) and ethnic victimization ( $r = -.15$ ). In addition, global self-worth was negatively related to personal ( $r = -.23$ ) and ethnic victimization ( $r = -.14$ ), as well as to teasing/name calling ( $r = -.08$ ). Social exclusion was not significantly related to the two self-feelings measures.

Based on this pattern of correlations we tested a model in which ethnic self-esteem was influenced by personal and ethnic victimization, and global self-worth by personal and ethnic victimization, teasing/name calling, and ethnic self-

**Table 3***Estimated path coefficients of the latent factors on ethnic self-esteem and global self-worth*

	<i>Personal victim.</i>	<i>Ethnic discrim.</i>	<i>Teasing/ name calling</i>	<i>Ethnic self-esteem</i>
<i>Dutch</i>				
Ethnic self-esteem	-.021	-.066*		
Global self-worth	-.101*	.004	-.038**	.299*
<i>Turks</i>				
Ethnic self-esteem	-.021	-.066*		
Global self-worth	-.101*	.004	-.038**	.253*
<i>Moroccans</i>				
Ethnic self-esteem	-.021	-.066*		
Global self-worth	-.101*	.004	-.038**	.297*
<i>Surinamese</i>				
Ethnic self-esteem	-.021	-.066*		
Global self-worth	-.101*	.004	-.038**	.316*

\* $p < .01$ ; \*\* $p < .001$ .

esteem. In this model the predictor coefficients of ethnic self-esteem and global self-worth were constrained to be similar for all groups. The fit of this model was adequate,  $\chi^2(149, 2682) = 385.347$ ,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .959, SRMR = .069, and RMSEA = .024. Lmtest suggested that the influences of the three latent victimization factors in this model were not significantly different across the four groups. The model is presented in Table 3.

The results show that within each ethnic group, ethnic discrimination uniquely predicted ethnic self-esteem and personal victimization uniquely predicted global personal self-worth. Ethnic discrimination was significantly correlated to ethnic self-esteem and global self-worth in the previous analyses, but when global self-worth was simultaneously regressed on both ethnic self-esteem and ethnic discrimination, only ethnic self-esteem was a significant predictor. Thus, within all four ethnic groups there was support for the hypothesis that ethnic self-esteem mediated the relationship between ethnic discrimination and feelings of global self-worth (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Ethnic self-esteem did not mediate the relationship between personal victimization and global self-worth.

## Discussion

Ethnic discrimination by peers contributes to the problems and conflicts of ethnic minority children around the world. With discrimination, a part of the self is implicated. Therefore, it is likely that being treated negatively on the basis of one's ethnic identity has a negative influence on the self-evaluation of this identity and thereby on global self-worth. The present findings provide clear, supporting evidence for this idea: Ethnic self-esteem was found to mediate the relationship between perceived discrimination and feelings of global self-worth. Hence, ethnic discrimination is related to global self-worth because it affects the evaluation of ethnic identity, which is part of the individuals' self-concept. By showing an important mechanism through which perceived discrimination affects



global self-worth, this study contributes to a further understanding of the development of feelings of global self-worth among minority group children.

Not only was mediation found for the Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese early adolescents; it was also found among their Dutch peers. This suggests that minority status does not have a moderating effect on how negative ethnic peer interactions influence global self-worth and how ethnic self-esteem is implicated in this process (see also Grossman, Wirt, & Davids, 1985; Verkuyten & Lay, 1999). This result suggests a “one model fits all” approach to studying early adolescents in multiethnic settings and is in agreement with multifaceted or hierarchical models of the self. These models place global self-worth at the apex, and consider other self-evaluations, such as ethnic self-esteem, as sources for global self-worth. In addition, specific experiences are seen as influencing these self-evaluations. Support for these models has been found in different countries and for different domains including peer relations and social identity evaluations (e.g., Byrne & Shavelson, 1996; Hoelter, 1986).

However, a common mechanism for all groups does not imply that there are not important differences between and within groups. For example, there were differences between the Dutch on the one hand and the ethnic minorities on the other, such as with experiences of ethnic discrimination, which are lower for the Dutch, and self-feelings (ethnic self-esteem and global self-worth) which, similar to many other studies (see Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Twenge & Crocker, 2002, for reviews), are more positive among the ethnic minority groups. Furthermore, there were differences between the ethnic minority groups in, for instance, the level of peer victimization.

Research on peer victimization typically does not consider situations in which children are treated negatively because of their ethnic background, and research on discrimination does not consider other forms of victimization. In this study, however, ethnic discrimination was examined in relation to different dimensions of victimization. We used structural equation techniques for examining the latent factors underlying the victimization questions. A good fit for a four-factor solution was found in which a distinction had been made between reasons for victimization (personal versus ethnic) and forms of victimization (teasing/name calling versus social exclusion). This result shows that it is important to take different dimensions of victimization into account. Peer victimization is a multifaceted phenomenon and the role of its dimensions in perceptions, evaluations and behavior may differ. Thus, in order to get a clear picture of the meaning and effects of ethnic peer discrimination, it is important to consider various dimensions.

The four-factor solution was adequate for all four ethnic groups but additional analyses also showed some group differences. For example, the latent factors of personal and ethnic victimization were more strongly associated among the Turkish and Moroccan participants than they were for the Dutch and the Surinamese. Hence, for the former two groups, ethnic discrimination was more closely related to personal victimization. There are at least three possible interpretations of this. A first and plausible explanation is that ethnic identity is a psychologically more central or important part of the Turkish and Moroccan early adolescents' self. Higher psychological centrality of ethnic group membership for Turks and Moroccans compared to other groups has indeed been found

in previous Dutch studies (see Verkuyten, 2005).<sup>4</sup> This could explain why members of these groups tend to make less of a distinction between personal and ethnic victimization.

A second interpretation is that for the Turks and Moroccans experiences with personal and ethnic victimization are perhaps more strongly intertwined. These two groups are the least accepted in The Netherlands (Hagendoorn, 1995; Verkuyten & Kinket, 2000) and may face a higher level of uncertainty about whether the negative reactions of others are indicators of something about themselves as individuals or as ethnic group members. However, if this is the case than one would expect the effect of personal victimization on global self-worth to be (partly) mediated by ethnic self-esteem. This, however, was not found.

Third, for the Turks and Moroccans ethnic discrimination may represent a greater part of victimization experiences in general. In trying to measure personal victimization, the first part of our questionnaire focused participants' attention on their personal selves, and they were asked to what extent they themselves were being teased, called names and socially excluded. However, the participants may in part have responded to these question in terms of their overall assessment of peer victimization rather than victimization related to personal characteristics. Hence, it is possible that the distinction between personal and ethnic victimization involved a difference in the level of abstraction required: An assessment of victimization one faces in general and an assessment of victimization based on one's ethnic group membership. This interpretation would also provide an alternative explanation for the finding that ethnic self-esteem did not mediate the relationship between personal victimization and global personal self-worth. This result may not reflect the personal aspect of the latter two constructs but rather their similar general level of abstraction. However, the questions on personal victimization were explicitly asked in the context of an introduction and other questions that focused on the personal self. Furthermore, other studies on peer victimization have worked with a similar differentiation between the personal and the ethnic self. For example, in an experimental study among Turkish early adolescents, peer victimization based on individual characteristics (“always acting funny”) or on ethnic group membership was made salient (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2001). It was found that personal victimization was related to global self-worth but not to ethnic self-esteem. Hence, personal victimization at the level of individual behavior was related to global self-worth.

In our study, teasing and name calling had a stronger and more consistent negative effect on global self-worth than social exclusion from play. A possible reason is that situations of teasing and name calling are explicit and public expressions of negativity. In general, these forms of peer victimization are less ambiguous than being excluded from play activities which often is more easy to justify (e.g., Killen & Stangor, 2001;

<sup>4</sup> An additional result for the present sample also points in this direction. In the questionnaire and by using a single item the participants were asked on a 5-point scale to indicate how important they consider their ethnic identity. One-way analysis with ethnic group as an independent factor yielded a highly significant result,  $F(3, 2623) = 209.75, p < .001$ . The Dutch ( $M = 2.68, SD = .86$ ) had a significantly lower score than the Surinamese ( $M = 3.19, SD = .89$ ), the Turks ( $M = 3.45, SD = .81$ ) and the Moroccans ( $M = 3.55, SD = .72$ ). In addition, the Surinamese differed significantly from the Turks and the Moroccans.

Verkuyten et al., 1997). Hence, when peers make their evaluations and beliefs explicit they can exert considerable influence. Other studies have found comparable results. Aboud and Doyle (1996), for example, found that there is no relationship between the private ethnic beliefs of children and their peers, and that children were unaware of their peers' beliefs. However, the direct expression of ethnic beliefs affected ethnic attitudes (Aboud & Fenwick, 1999). Future studies should examine different types and dimensions of peer victimization more closely. For example, the unequal sharing of goods, shunning, the spreading of rumors and physical acts of aggression could be examined. In addition, the distinction between overt and covert, and between direct and indirect forms of discrimination and victimization seems useful. The findings show that boys reported more experiences with personal victimization and with ethnic discrimination, and these gender differences might be stronger for direct or physical forms of victimization (Smith et al., 1999). Similarly, some types might be more or less prevalent among and between different ethnic groups and may also vary across situations and contexts.

In order to evaluate the present results and to give some additional suggestions for further study, three characteristics of our research will be considered. First, only early adolescents participated in this study. Therefore, future studies will have to establish whether the present findings may be generalized to other age groups. For example, it is likely that ethnicity plays a more prominent role in the self-concept of older ethnic minority youth, as is suggested by developmental models (e.g., Cross, 1991; Phinney, 1989). Although these models are somewhat different, they suggest a common process in which individuals progress from an unexamined view of their ethnicity to an exploration phase, often triggered by 'encounters' with discrimination. Ultimately a positive and secure sense of their ethnicity would develop and this would be typical for late adolescence and young adulthood rather than for early or middle adolescence. Furthermore, in their developmental model of the perception of discrimination, Brown and Bigler (2005) have identified developmental and individual differences as well as situational variables that are likely to influence children's perceived discrimination. The goal of their developmental model is to spur related research and they offer many starting points for doing so.

Second, our focus has been on ethnic self-esteem and global self-worth which are widely recognized as central issues for ethnic minority youth. However, there are other possible consequences which have not been addressed and which should be studied more fully, such as feelings of control, efficacy, life satisfaction and depression. Minority status probably has a differentiated effect on different dimensions of the self and well-being; not all aspects are affected in a uniform manner (e.g., Demo & Hughes, 1990; Fisher et al., 2000; Hughes & Demo, 1989; Szalacha et al., 2003). This, of course, poses the question of why certain dimensions are affected while others are not, and it seems important to pursue this question systematically in research.

Third, in examining the relationship between global self-worth and ethnic identity, our focus was on ethnic self-esteem. Ethnic identity, however, is a multidimensional construct and its various components may be related differently to global self-esteem (e.g., Ashmore et al., 2004; Sellers et al., 1998). In order to reach a clear picture of the role of ethnic identity in the global self-worth of minority group members, further

research needs to consider other dimensions such as knowledge about the group one belongs to, significance of one's group to one's self-concept, commitment to that group, and feelings of interdependence and belonging. For example, feelings of belonging may compensate for potential threats posed by ethnic discrimination and a strong ethnic identity may provide a sense of self that counters the negative messages conveyed by peers and the broader society (Cross, 1991; Sellers et al., 1998; Wong et al., 2003). Furthermore, the present study cannot determine the causal direction of the effects. Based on theoretical notions about the structure of the self, we treated ethnic self-esteem as an outcome of ethnic discrimination and ethnic self-esteem as a predictor of global self-worth. However, the evaluation of ethnic group membership may also be an antecedent to perceptions of discrimination and global self-worth may affect this particular self-evaluation.

Despite these qualifications and limitations, we think that the present research makes a contribution to the literature on ethnicity and self-feelings. The results show an important mechanism through which perceived discrimination influences global self-worth. In agreement with hierarchical models of the self, this mechanism was found for all four groups of early adolescents. In addition, there were differences between the Dutch on the one hand and ethnic minorities on the other, and there were differences between the ethnic minority groups. Hence, the results suggest that, in addition to common patterns and tendencies for all early adolescents, it is useful to distinguish between the majority group on the one hand, and minority groups on the other. Prejudice and discrimination against ethnic minorities is well documented and similar processes seem to be operative among different groups of minority children. At the same time, a majority-minority model is also limited because it tends to ignore differences between minority groups as well as the variety in perceptions and reactions to prejudice and discrimination within groups. Hence, the results provide support for the idea that a "one model fits all" approach for studying the development of ethnic minority group children is useful, but to a limited extent.

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